

U.S. Defense Department to pay?Big rewards offered  
for Viet Cong 'bosses'

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Saigon

The Saigon government's failure to capture many high-level members of the Viet Cong political underground is one of the main reasons for a new high-rewards system being set up here.

Rewards systems have existed here in the past, but none has matched this one. The payoff could now go as high as the piaster equivalent of nearly \$11,000 for information leading to the capture of a given high-ranking member of the Viet Cong "infrastructure."

The new rewards project will be part of the Saigon government's Phung Hoang, or "Phoenix," program which is aimed at destroying the Viet Cong political and administrative apparatus. The controversial Phoenix program has strong U.S. backing, and it is understood that funds for the new "high-value rewards" program are to come from the U.S. Department of Defense.

The new program is expected to start within the next few weeks, with pilot projects in one province in each of South Vietnam's four military regions. If successful on this basis, it will be expanded nationwide to all 44 provinces.

**'Phantom government'**

Lists of the "most wanted" members of the Viet Cong "phantom government" in the four selected provinces have already been drawn up for approval by Saigon. Only 10 high-ranking Viet Cong political cadre are to be "targeted" in each province.

The rewards have to be high, officials say, because a person who gives information leading to the arrest of a high-level Viet Cong cadre might be forced to leave his home and reestablish himself and his family at another location because of possible reprisals from the Viet Cong. The rewards will range from one million to three million piasters (\$3,636 to \$10,909).

Phoenix operations have been a disappointment to many officials and military men because they have failed thus far to result in the capture of anything more than a very small percentage of the highest-level members of the Viet Cong political underground.

But officials here resent the charge which has been leveled by several U.S. congressmen that Phoenix is an "assassination program" directed at civilians. They say that most members of the Viet Cong "infrastructure," such as administrative cadre or tax collectors, while classified as civilians because of their functions, usually carry weapons. But the officials say that such persons are much more valuable to the government if they are captured, not killed.

**Bounties to increase**

Under the new rewards system, bounties paid to military or police units for the capture of an individual are to be increased, and the amount to be paid for the capture of a man is to be twice that paid for a "kill."

"When they target a man, they always try to capture him because of the information he might have," said one official.

Ambassador William E. Colby, former head of the U.S. side of the "pacification" program in South Vietnam, recently told a congressional subcommittee that 68,982 persons had been counted as killed, captured, or defecting to the Saigon government in Phoenix operations from 1963 to May of this year. The figure includes 20,537 listed as killed.

But Mr. Colby maintained that assassination is not an aim of the program.

"In the course of normal military operations or police actions to apprehend them, however, members of the infrastructure have been killed as members of military units or while fighting off arrests," Mr. Colby said.

According to a news report from Washington, a still-classified General Accounting Office report says that \$80 million in U.S. funds have been devoted to the Phoenix program in the past three years, mostly from the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency. Several hundred American military personnel are engaged as advisers to the program, but the number is decreasing.

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